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Kentucky Students to Get a New Look at Space with NASA Antenna

Students from across Kentucky will get a new tool with which to explore space with the relocation of a NASA satellite tracking antenna to Morehead State University.

Morehead President Ronald Eaglin said "Transfer of the satellite tracking station from NASA will revolutionize the science curriculum at Morehead State University. We also are very excited about this project's potential impact on high-tech economic development related to satellite telecommunications. The long-term impact that this project will have on a region desperate for high-tech training opportunities is immeasurable."

Steve Carrier, manager of the Ground Network Project Office for NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Md., said, "NASA is extremely pleased to see new life breathed into the antenna system. It has served NASA well for more than 30 years and now it will be used to train a new generation of space scientists and engineers."

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The antenna system stands approximately nine stories tall and the tracking dish is 60-feet (18 meters) in diameter. In recent years, its primary mission was to provide tracking and control for the International Ultraviolet Explorer (IUE) satellite. NASA decommissioned the antenna system after the IUE mission ended in 1997.

According to Dr. Benjamin Malphrus, director of the Morehead State Astrophysics Laboratory, the NASA antenna will provide a replacement for the Morehead Radio Telescope. The system also will allow Morehead to compete for the opportunity to support future NASA satellite missions.

While located at Morehead, the antenna will be shared statewide by researchers at the University of Louisville, University of Kentucky and the regional universities, Malphrus said. He added, "In addition to supporting research, it will be part of a state-of-the-art laboratory for students in astrophysics, satellite telecommunications, electrical engineering and software development."

Representatives from Morehead are scheduled to begin training on the operation of the antenna at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va., in January 2001. Disassembly and shipping from Wallops to Morehead State is expected to begin in the summer and take three to four months.

The transfer of the NASA antenna was made possible through the Kentucky National Science Foundation Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NSF EPSCoR) program.